

Executive Summary

The courts face increasing public, litigant, counsel, and employee expectations to conduct business online and remotely using technology. These expectations, with the profusion of technological change and new technologies implemented during the pandemic, now require a constant effort to maintain and update systems and programs to meet both the needs of our customers and judicial officers and staff. Technological needs in the courts range from conducting proceedings virtually to expanding electronic access to services and documents, to providing additional system functionality and technological tools across the state.



Chief Justice Robert Brutinel provides direction for both the courts' business and technology efforts. His vision for the Arizona Judicial Branch is embodied in the publication *Justice for the Future: Planning for Excellence 2019-2024*.

Having built a robust infrastructure and key “back-office” functions, Arizona court automation continues making major improvements through implementation of “second-generation” automated systems, continuing the journey to exploit process efficiencies and economies of scale to better serve citizens.

- At the state level, the supporting infrastructure includes the Arizona Judicial Information Network (AJIN), various database and application servers, and the attached PCs with desktop productivity software.
- Back-office functions at the state level include the limited and general jurisdiction case, cash, jury, juvenile and adult probation and other record management systems; statewide email; Internet/Intranet access; and the central data repositories that support public access, statistical reporting, and analysis.
- Public access and justice partner enablement includes e-filing, digital evidence management, remote hearing software, Microsoft Teams collaboration software, and eAccess.
- For larger courts, especially those jurisdictions having their own self-contained tracking systems, back-office functions include continued maintenance, enhancement, and development of local systems, networks, and desktop environments.

Maintaining, operating, and enhancing this infrastructure and back-office functionality remains a priority to allow courts to keep better records, perform case management functions more efficiently and effectively, and promote greater accountability. Some of these back-office applications have reached the end of their useful life, along with their supporting infrastructure, and require replacement. A continued focus in this plan is to replace those systems that contribute to longstanding “technology debt,” increase business resilience during unforeseen circumstances, and continue tackling front-office automation while increasing public access to justice-related processes and information, including remote court proceedings.

Arizona courts will continue to improve their business practices, especially ones to better serve the participants in the judicial process, including law enforcement, the legal community, jury members, victims, self-represented litigants, the media, and the public at large. To that end, the *Arizona Judicial Branch Information Technology Strategic Plan: 2022-2024* aligns

with the judiciary's business goals found in the Arizona Judicial publication *Justice for the Future: Planning for Excellence 2019-2024*, which defines its vision for connecting with and protecting the community.

SERVING THE PUBLIC

Public safety remains a key governing principle that directs automation. Where more complete and timely information is available about criminals, the public is better served. Integration of justice information, especially among criminal justice agencies, powers this goal. The courts continue working for better, closer, and more automated interaction with law enforcement, the Department of Corrections, prosecution and defense agencies, as well as social services agencies, integrating with those systems to the extent possible. Criminal justice agencies are able to respond in the best interests of the public when they have ready access to probation information, orders of protection, warrants for arrest, and pending DUI cases. The courts continue building their processes and infrastructure to record this information electronically and are now focusing, in cooperation with other criminal justice agencies, on sharing information in real-time, especially protective orders, warrant information, and relevant data for instant background checks associated with firearms purchases, even information related to juvenile offenders.

Being responsive to the public is a key initiative. With enhanced public safety and public service as goals, initiatives include providing for public information access; enhanced "self-service" support for the self-represented, including online protective order petitions, interactive forms, and Spanish-language forms accepted statewide; improved interaction with potential jurors; technological improvements in courtrooms; and a vastly improved ability to provide court functions and interactions with the courts remotely. This not only responds to the public health emergency brought on by the pandemic, but also complements the State of Arizona's initiative for e-government. The Judicial Branch will continue to use technology to improve its ability to offer service in the e-government arena.

IMPROVING EFFICIENCY WITH NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Improving the efficiency of Judicial Branch processes is an important goal. Several technologies are being implemented to support it. Electronic document management, electronic filing, and judge automation can help the courts to digitize and manage records more efficiently. The use of audio and video to record court proceedings is another technology solution that is proving both cost-efficient and effective. Use of participant-friendly video conferencing for remote hearings and appearances saves time and transportation costs, and contributes to public safety. Several rural superior courts are continuing to expand video conferencing use to address chronic court reporter and court interpreter shortages. Courts are also getting in front of the growing wave of digital evidence using a comprehensive statewide approach.

Efforts to address the records management challenges of the court system are maturing. The acquisition of electronic document management systems (EDMS) that include abilities for imaging, electronic filing, document storage, and document archiving for long-term preservation is nearly complete. The focus on providing a centralized EDMS along with procedures and processes for limited jurisdiction (LJ) courts and clerks of the superior court that lack the local resources to manage a standalone system continues with more than 140 courts now using the facility. EDMS forms the vital foundation for accepting electronic documents from the public and legal community (e-filing) as well as for providing remote access to case documents. Automated systems and processes have matured to the point where a paper "safety net" is not as vital as it once was. Since no paper exists for e-filed documents, technical requirements have been communicated to courts desiring to substitute an electronic record for paper "originals." Business continuity solutions are being examined to ensure that multiple copies of electronic court records are stored in geographically diverse locations to make certain they remain available when needed by courts and justice partners.

With e-government, integration, electronic documents, digital evidence, and other remote electronic access to services comes the need for security and authentication. The Judicial Branch continues stepping up its emphasis on the availability of electronic records as paper usage diminishes. As mentioned above, the business continuity critical to preserving the electronic supply chain of justice is being put in place. A statewide approach for electronic authorizations and electronic

signatures using a systemic, “simplify and unify” approach is near. The interactions with state and local agencies, their needs, and technological capabilities are being reviewed along with internal branch needs to ensure the appropriate controls are in place for different types of filings.

The sudden and massive shift to remote proceedings and offsite work brought on by the pandemic health crisis accelerated digitization and adoption of new technologies at an unprecedented pace. Network bandwidth was doubled overnight and VPN capacity greatly expanded, a Zoom enterprise license was procured and a central registry erected for video proceedings; headsets and cameras were distributed for remote hearing and meeting attendance. A planned laptop refresh was accelerated to address security concerns. The scope of both e-filing and online dispute resolution was expanded to enable more distant interaction with courts and litigants. In the wake of these largely unplanned changes, courts are now challenged with simplifying, standardizing, and bringing uniformity to remote court interactions during the plan period.

ENTERPRISE ARCHITECTURE AND STANDARDS

For almost two decades, the direction of technology in the courts has been towards shared resources, standards, and elimination of duplicate efforts and systems. The 2022-2024 Information Technology Strategic Plan continues projects that foster cooperation and leveraging. Leveraging has become institutionalized as a process, yielding a standards-based technology environment. At the recommendation of the Commission on Technology (COT), a statewide committee providing technology oversight, and its subcommittee, the Technical Advisory Council (TAC), the Arizona Judiciary has adopted technical standards for automation statewide so that development can be shared, training leveraged, and cooperative projects undertaken. The enterprise architecture includes technical industry standards, protocols, and methodologies, and, where business value can be identified, even products and detailed specifications. Arizona Code of Judicial Administration § 1-505 adopted the architecture. See <https://www.azcourts.gov/Portals/87/EAS2020.pdf?ver=2020-02-06-150324-233>. These detailed standards, products, and specifications provide needed direction to projects conducted at all levels of courts and between courts and justice partners. New procurements of vendor-developed software are also being aligned with the architecture targets.

STANDARDIZING CODES AND PROCESSES

Automation table code standardization supports statewide uniformity of information recorded in case management systems (CMSs). It is difficult to transfer data to other local and state entities, write standardized reports, and aggregate statewide statistics when every court uses different words, abbreviations, or codes for the same thing. This posed a problem for the legacy AZTEC CMS and more recently for the data integration needed to enable a statewide protective order repository. Mapping local codes to statewide codes has proven to be very labor intensive with mixed results. Differences from court to court and bench to bench are being resolved as part of the effort to populate the central case repository that replaces the legacy data warehouse. Superior court clerks and limited jurisdiction court representatives are well into this standardization effort and have delivered both standard codes and associated terms for use with the statewide case management system. The Supreme Court Committee on Data-Based Court Performance and Data Standards maintains and governs these standardized codes and terms for all levels of courts through a data standardization workgroup.

Creation of standardized processing workflows that take into account the size and level of a court is also a COT recommendation. The approach enables more standardized training and less complex automation since fewer unique practices have to be addressed. “Best practices” for courts’ workflow processes are contained within the second-generation case management systems, a direction approved by the Arizona Judicial Council (AJC) more than a decade ago.

NEW SYSTEMS BECOMING REALITY

The drivers for projects to develop and implement second-generation automated systems include:

- Outdated technologies
- Business process inefficiencies
- Security risks
- High maintenance costs and complexities
- Lack of business resilience

In the fast-paced world of technology, it is an extraordinary accomplishment to sustain and support an automation system for 10 to 15 years. Some of the courts' systems are this old or older and now well beyond the end of their life cycles, making technical support very expensive or even impossible. They must be replaced.

APETS, a statewide adult probation tracking and management system developed in the late 1990s and implemented statewide by 2005, is currently in the process of being replaced. A request for proposals (RFP) and evaluation of responses will lead to selection of the most capable vendor product for accomplishing probation automation. Changes for continued supportability of its ageing infrastructure have been made; other enhancement requests are being carefully weighed against the estimated return on investment over the diminishing lifetime of the program while the multi-year selection, customization, and roll out of its successor completes.

Appellation, the appellate court CMS developed in the mid 1990s, is also beyond its design life and is being replaced during the plan period. An RFP and evaluation of responses led to selection of the eCourt system from Journal Technologies, Inc., a commercial product which is now being configured for the Arizona appellate environment as "AzACES."

Several of the larger municipal courts and consolidated justice courts in the state not using AJACS also find themselves with end-of-life CMSs and the eventual need to undertake expensive, complex development projects to replace them. Adoption of the statewide case management system provides the most economical solution to their technology dilemma. Those courts were represented in the governance, gap analysis, development, and testing efforts, and are now monitoring the health and remaining functional life of the various legacy systems.

Simplifying and making more uniform the financial rules and fund allocation procedures remain an important priority. The complexity of the distribution of funds collected by courts increases the challenge of implementing any off-the-shelf vendor software package and makes the maintenance of existing financial systems costly and resource consuming. The judiciary continues to examine financial procedures and statutory requirements to identify ways in which the financial business of courts could be handled more easily. Realistically, courts will not be able to effect change of all the complexity at once. This will be a long-term effort to reduce complexity while resisting efforts or legislation that might introduce additional complexity into the system.

FARE COLLECTIONS

One hundred seventy-six courts in all fifteen counties have now implemented the unified Fines/Fees and Restitution Enforcement Project (FARE) process whereby all citations and payments entered into their case management system are automatically passed to a collections agency that will:

- Send a reminder notice before the court date
- Set up a Web and interactive phone payment service
- Send out delinquency notices
- Perform skip tracing
- Interact with MVD for court enforcement programs (TTEAP)
- Automate the Tax Interface Program (TIP) interface

- Set up, bill, and track payment contracts
- Provide outbound calling for further collections efforts after noticing has completed.

FARE has collected over \$899 million to date on outstanding local debts, disbursed to statutory funds at the local, county, and state levels. Of that amount, over \$230.1 million has been collected via electronic media, the Web, and telephone IVR. Nearly 1.32 million TTEAP holds have been placed with over 862,000 releases, thus far, a release rate of 65.2 percent.

SYSTEMIC FUNDING CHALLENGES

The judiciary faces many challenges in pursuit of these strategic initiatives. Perennially among the greatest challenges, continuous and appropriate funding looms even larger in light of double-digit drops in case-volume-associated revenues while still addressing the multi-year statewide replacements/deployments for the adult probation management system and appellate CMSs, electronic case filing/electronic access expansion, increase in resilience needed for continuity of courts' digital operations, as well as a multi-year refresh effort for all desktop and laptop computers. In addition, ever increasing technology debt necessitates changes in the acquisition and licensing model for servers, client access device (PC) operating systems, and software used to support courts. New centralized solutions continue to come online, increasing the vital importance of providing robust business continuity. Achieving justice integration and statewide electronic access to critical court information requires coordination of efforts, detailed standards, and funding. This is difficult when funding is so limited and dispersed among so many different entities statewide. Worse, planned funding for various initiatives got interrupted by the continued decrease in JCEF (a state-level automation funding source) revenues of over 20 percent since FY11, removing well over \$13 million in funding from statewide automation initiatives. Courts continue working to enhance both local and centralized pools of automation funding to leverage the success of what has already been built and carry the judiciary forward in a consistent way to support its goals of improving public safety and public service. Funding streams currently in place are predominately consumed by maintenance of core applications; little funding exists for any additional innovations, customer-facing solutions, or improvements to disaster recovery. Without a significant increase in revenue over time, courts are limited to only maintaining the current automation systems on their current platforms within the current environment accompanied by only a rudimentary solution for disaster recovery.

TECHNOLOGY PRIORITIES

The Arizona Judicial Branch's information technology initiatives support its strategic agenda outlined in *Justice for the Future: Planning for Excellence 2019-2024*. At its June 2021 strategic planning session, the Commission on Technology continued its previous approach of establishing overarching strategic priorities that transcend any specific project. The priorities were affirmed in the order indicated below:

1. Production Support
2. Manage & Improve Security
3. Improve Technology Recovery Capability
4. Replace Obsolete Systems
5. Review and Reinforce Technology Support
6. Virtual Court Enablement
7. Public Facing Services (eFiling, eAccess, eNotification, ODR)

8. Identify Funding Needs and Stable Sources
9. Integrate Systems to Improve Productivity and Capability
10. Enhance Core Systems with New Functionality

COT members also reaffirmed the importance of existing strategic projects while clarifying the names of a couple of projects. Projects were reviewed and placed in the general priority set indicated below:

- Deploy & Refine New eFiling Case Types
- Refine LJ Judge Automation for eFiling
- Justice Court eFiling
- FARE – Infrastructure Port/Enhance
- Deploy Online Dispute Resolution
- Mental Health Repository
- Data Standards Translation Technology
- IT Operational Standards
- APETS Replacement
- eWarrant System Rollout
- Appellate New CMS Implementation
- LJ PSA Automation
- Data Access Portals
- Digital Evidence
- Virtual Court Support
- Child Support Calculator Updates
- Prosecutor/PD System Integration

The *Justice for the Future: Planning for Excellence 2019-2024* reflects technology planning for all Arizona courts. Typically, State Appellate Courts and the Superior Court in each county, on behalf of their general and limited jurisdiction courts, prepare or update their information technology strategic plans as the foundation for the statewide planning process. Due to the continuing economic challenges government is facing at all levels, the Commission on Technology voted to require formal plan input from rural courts only every other year. Those accomplishments and directions received in the current planning cycle have been incorporated into the statewide technology activities coordinated by the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). The most recent individual plans or updates received by county appear in Appendix D.